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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relative effectiveness of repeated readings and listening-while-reading in promoting reading fluency. Subjects, 20 third grade students in a community in the southeastern United States, of high, average, and low reading levels, had their reading fluency measured in two cycles: subjects who repeatedly read a passage in the first cycle repeatedly listened to a presentation of a passage in the second cycle, and subjects who repeatedly listened to a passage in the first cycle repeatedly read a passage in the second cycle. Results indicated that there was no significant difference for reading rate or accuracy by order of presentation of treatment and that both methods were effective in improving reading fluency. (Two tables of data are included; 15 references are attached.) (RS)

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THE EFFECTS OF REPEATED READING AND REPEATED LISTENING WHILE READING ON READING FLUENCY

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Abstract

The development of reading fluency is an important goal of reading instruction. Two approaches proven effective for fostering fluency are the method of repeated reading and reading-while-listening. The effectiveness of both approaches in promoting fluency for third-grade students was compared. Results indicated that both approaches resulted in significant gains in reading speed and word recognition accuracy. However, no significant differences between methods were detected. Implications for classroom reading instruction employing both approaches are discussed.

The development of reading fluency in students is considered an important goal of reading instruction. It is one goal, however, that has neither been actively pursued nor fully realized in the reading curriculum (Allington, 1983; Anderson, 1981).

In recent years instructional methodologies have been developed that are aimed at achieving reading fluency in neophyte readers. One of the most promising of these methodologies is the method of repeated readings (Samuels, 1979). In this approach readers practice reading one text until some predetermined level of fluency is achieved. Samuels explains that the method helps students develop word recognition skills to a point of automaticity, a necessary level of processing for fluent reading. Schreiber (1980) notes, also, that repeated readings help students to develop proficiency in reading in syntactically appropriate phrases, also a necessary element in fluent reading. Critical to the method of repeated readings is the observation that gains in fluency made through the repeated readings of one text are transferred to new, previously unread texts.

Research into the method of repeated readings has rather consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of the approach (Dowhower, 1987; Herman, 1985; Samuels, 1979; Taylor, Wade & Yekovich, 1985). In a recent study, for example, Dowhower (1987) found that repeated readings

resulted in improved reading rate, accuracy, comprehension, and prosodic reading for a group of second-grade transitional readers.

A related technique used to improve reading fluency is repeated listening-while-reading texts. The method differs from repeated readings in that the reader reads the text while simultaneously listening to a fluent rendition of the same text. Schreiber (1980) suggests that the inclusion of a fluent oral model in the repeated readings method may prove more effective in promoting fluency that repeated readings alone. Moreover, the listening-while-reading approach may be a more versatile classroom instructional approach as the method can be implemented with groups of students, on a one-to-one basis, or with students working independently.

Research into the use of various listening-while-reading approaches has shown it also to be an effective method of instruction. Heckelman (1966), Chomsky (1976), Carbo (1978), and van der Leij (1981) have employed variations of the method with poor elementary readers. These researchers report positive results from the use of the listening-while-reading approach.

In one recent test of the listening-while-reading approach, in which a relatively negative outcome was reported, Reitsma (1988) compared a reading-while-listening practice approach against two other reading practice

approaches for beginning readers. The other practice approaches were a guided reading and an independent reading with feedback practice format. The guided approach was essentially a form of round robin reading. In the independent practice format students could obtain computer generated help when needed. Reitsma found that the guided and independent reading formats were more effective than reading-while-listening in students' learning 20 words that were part of their practice texts. It should be pointed out, however, that the students read five different texts one time each on the five consecutive days of the treatment. Thus, the nature of the student's reading practice did not conform to the critical features of repeated readings or listening-while-reading.

Similarly, Dowhower's (1987) study included a comparison of repeated reading and listening-while-reading. Few differences in rate, word recognition accuracy, and comprehension gains were noted between the two methods. The listening-while-reading format did, however, lead to greater improvements in phrased reading. The listening-while-reading method, as operationalized by Dowhower, did allow students to move into independent repeated reading of a text once students themselves felt that they could read the text without the oral assistance. Thus, in this study, the listening-while-reading approach was confounded with

independent repeated reading.

Thus, while studies of both repeated readings and listening-while-reading formats have demonstrated the effectiveness of each, no known studies have compared the relative effectiveness of each method in promoting fluency. The purpose, then, of the present study was to compare the effectiveness of the methods of repeated reading and listening-while-reading, both fluency building activities, in promoting improvements in third-grade students' reading fluency.

Method

Subjects

Twenty subjects were selected from the third-grades of several elementary schools in a community in the Southeastern United States. Subjects were paired with students of equal reading ability (as identified by the classroom teacher in consultation with standardized reading test scores). Subject pairs fell into high, average and low reading levels.

Materials

Two equivalent passages, at the fourth-grade level, were taken from a commercially produced informal reading inventory (Silvaroli, 1973). Both passages contained approximately 100 words. Fourth-grade passages were used to insure that students would at least initially find the selections somewhat challenging.

Procedures

Each of two separate treatment periods consisted of four consecutive day cycles. On the first day of both cycles each student in a pair orally read one of the two test passages. The oral readings were audio tape recorded and measures of reading speed and word recognition errors were calculated from the recordings. Mispronunciations, substitutions, insertions, and omissions were counted as errors.

On the second and third day of each cycle one student in each pair orally read, in the presence of the teacher, the passage on which he/she was tested. The second student listened while the teacher orally read, in a fluent style, the passage on which he/she was earlier tested. A copy of the text was also given to the student who was instructed to follow along silently as the teacher read the passage. Posttesting occurred on day four of each cycle and replicated the pretesting conducted on day one.

The second treatment cycle was the same as the first except that treatments were reversed for each subject in a pair and the other of the two passages was used. Subjects who had repeatedly read the passage in the first cycle repeatedly listened to a presentation of the second passage in the second cycle. Subjects who had repeatedly listened to

the passages in the first cycle repeatedly read the other passage in the second cycle. The order passage presentation was counterbalanced among all ten pairs of subjects.

Results

The purpose of the study was to investigate differences in fluency that are involved in repeated readings and repeated listening-while-reading activities. Fluency was operationally defined in terms of reading speed and word recognition accuracy. The results, then, are presented from this perspective.

First, no significant differences were detected for rate or accuracy by order of presentation of treatment. In other words, it appeared to make no difference whether subjects were given the listening treatment prior to the reading treatment or the reading treatment prior to the listening treatment.

Means and standard deviations for reading speed and accuracy by the two treatments are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 About Here.

Rate and Accuracy scores were analyzed using a two way analysis of variance (treatment by pre-posttest). Gains made from pretest to posttest for both treatments were found to be

significant for both reading speed ($F(1,19)=28.71$, $p<.0001$) and reading accuracy ($F(1,19)=10.83$, $p<.01$). Significant differences, however, were not detected between repeated reading and listening-while-reading treatments for either reading speed ($F(1,19)=.25$, $p>.05$) or reading accuracy ($F(1,19)=.01$, $p>.05$). No interactions between treatment and gains between pre and posttests were found.

Discussion

The major findings of this study are: 1) both repeated readings and listening-while-reading treatments were found to be effective in improving the reading fluency of third-grade students, and 2) neither treatment was found to be superior to the other in improving students' reading fluency. The first finding confirms previous work done on the two techniques. Both methods appear to be effective in promoting reading fluency and general proficiency in reading.

The second finding is new. Based upon the duration of the treatments, both seem to be equally effective in improving fluency. The implications from this finding have substantive significance. The number of articles on repeated readings in reading practitioner journals may have suggested that repeated readings was the method of choice for fluency development. Teachers now, however, may have a choice in the methods or combinations of methods they choose to employ.

Repeated reading may have several practical drawbacks.

Over the long term, students may tire from its use. Students may lose interest in and motivation for the repetition of previously read material. Moreover, repeated readings may be more labor intensive for teachers as they are called on to provide assistance to individuals who are experiencing difficulty in initial readings. There are several variations of the listening-while-reading activity that can help maintain students' interest. Moreover, the use of tape recorded readings that students listen to on their own can help to make students more independent and interested in their reading activities. Such listening-while-reading activities can be particularly helpful for those students characterized as experiencing passive failure in reading (Johnston & Winograd, 1985; Winograd & Smith, 1987) as they learn to take personal command of their own growth in reading. In addition, listening-while-reading activities affirm the active role of the teacher in instruction and add considerable importance to the notion of modeling fluent reading within the context of reading instruction. Instructional time may also be maximized with the listening-while-reading approach as students' first reading attempts in a new text in repeated reading are often slow and halting, while the version heard in the listening-while-reading approach are fast paced and fluent.

The rather brief treatment duration, lack of a transfer

measure, and the use of only one grade level of students are sufficient reasons to suggest that further testing and comparisons of both methods are called for. In addition, reading curriculum researchers may wish to design, implement and test reading curricula that employ one or both of these methods, or some variation thereof in regular and special classrooms (see Rasinski & Zutell, 1989).

The efficacy of both approaches seems well documented. The equivalency of both approaches is now suggested. The time is appropriate to begin to employ these methods in regular reading curricula.

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TABLE 1

Reading Speed

(elapsed seconds to read passages)

	Pretest		Posttest		Gain
	M	SD	M	SD	
Repeated Reading	75.05	28.95	56.10	18.88	18.95
Listening-While-Reading	70.45	25.88	57.15	18.27	13.30

TABLE 2

Reading Accuracy

(word recognition errors per passage)

	Pretest		Posttest		Gain
	M	SD	M	SD	
Repeated Reading	5.90	3.11	4.05	3.15	1.85
Listening-While-Reading	6.10	4.56	4.05	3.17	2.05